

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PFOR, PN, PQ
SUBJECT: CANAL ZONE LABOR MEETING WITH TORRIJOS

REF: A. PANAMA 0950
B. PANAMA 1109

SUMMARY: IN A FEBRUARY 11 MEETING WITH UNIONS REPRESENTING PANAMANIAN CANAL ZONE EMPLOYEES, TORRIJOS REPEATED ASSURANCE THAT LABOR GAINS WOULD NOT BE REDUCED BY NEW TREATY, ASSURED LEADERS THAT LABOR WOULD BE CONSULTED, AND PROMISED TO ESTABLISH AN OFFICE FOR PERMANENT LIAISON ON CANAL ZONE LABOR MATTERS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, TORRIJOS MET AT FARALLON WITH SECRETARIES-GENERAL OF LOCALS 900 AND 907, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTRY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES (AFSCME), WHICH REPRESENT PANAMANIAN-CITIZEN EMPLOYEES OF PANCANAL AND US MILITARY, RESPECTIVELY. ALOS PRESENT AT MEETING WERE VICE-PRESIDENT GONZLEZ, FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALEZ-REVILLA, LABOR MINISTER AHUMADA, TREATY ADVISER ESCOBAR AND OTHER MEMBERS OF PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATING TEAM.

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2. DURING THE MEETING, TORRIJOS REPEATED HIS ASSURANCES OF SPRING 1975 THAT UNDER NEW TREATY, LABOR GAINS AND BENEFITS OF PANAMANIAN CITIZEN EMPLOYEES WOULD BE PROTECTED AND, IF POSSIBLE, INCREASED. HE PROMISED GREATER CONSULTATION WITH LABOR LEADERS REPRESENTING PANAMANIAN EMPLOYEES. A PERMANENT OFFICE WOULD BE

ESTABLISHED, HEADED BY NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION MEMBER, MANUEL BALBINO MORENO FOR LIAISON WITH LABOR ON MATTERS RELATING TO CANAL ZONE. (COMMENT: THIS, IT WOULD APPEAR, WILL ALSO FULFILL THE ROLE OF THE OFFICE FOR PROCESSING COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE CANAL ZONE MENTIONED BY TORRIJOS SOME WEEKS AGO AND NOT HEARD OF SINCE. END COMMENT).

3. TORRIJOS REPORTEDLY INDICATED THAT GONZALEZ-REVILLA AND MEMBERS OF NEGOTIATING TEAM WOULD CONSULT WITH LABOR LEADERS PRIOR AND SUBSEQUENT TO EACH NEGOTIATING ROUND. (FIRST SUCH SESSION WAS HELD LATE FEBRUARY 11 AT FOREIGN MINISTRY.)

4. TORRIJOS AND UNION LEADERS ALSO DISCUSSED PROBLEM OF CANAL ZONE EMPLOYEES DELINQUENT IN PAYMENT OF RENT OR MORTGAGE INSTALLMENTS TO GOP AGENCIES. A LONG LIST OF ALLEGED DELINQUENTS WAS PUBLISHED IN LOCAL PRESS SOME DAYS AGO, ACCOMPANIED BY A BROAD SUGGESTION THAT THEY WOULD BE FIRST TO GO AFTER NEW TREATY ENTERED INTO FORCE. UNIONS POINTED OUT SOME INACCURACIES IN THIS LIST, BUT SAID THAT DELINQUENT MEMBERS WERE PREPARED TO PAY THEIR DEBTS.

5. MEETING WAS REPORTED BRIEFLY, BUT AS LEAD ITEM, IN "ESTRELLA", AND AT GREATER LENGTH IN "MATUTINO" FOR FEBRUARY 12. THERE HAS BEEN NO COMMENT IN THE MEDIA ABOUT IT.

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6. COMMENT: THIS FOLLOWS TORRIJOS' MEETING OF FEBRUARY 7 WITH U.S. CITIZEN CANAL ZONE LABOR LEADERS REPORTED REFTEL. THAT MEETING WAS ORGANIZED AND ATTENDED BY LOCAL REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF NMU, WHICH REPRESENTS ROUGHLY HALF OF THE PANAMANIAN-CITIZEN EMPLOYEES OF BOTH PANCANAL AND MILITARY. AFSCME LOCALS REPRESENT THE REMAINDER, AND WERE ACTUALLY UNHAPPY AT BEING CUT OUT OF THE EARLIER MEETING WITH TORRIJOS. THESE LOCALS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MORE PUBLICLY ALIGNED WITH THE GOP THAN NMU, AND WERE HIGHLY CONCERNED AT POSSIBILITY THEY MIGHT BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD IN A LABOR-GOP DIALOG.

7. THE PRESUMPTION IN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE WAS THAT THESE UNIONS REPRESENT THE AUTHENTIC VOICE OF THE PANAMANIAN-CITIZEN CANAL ZONE WORKER. BY ITS PARTICIPATION IN THE EARLIER MEETING, NMU IS NOW PUBLICLY MUCH MORE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH PREDOMINANTLY US-CITIZEN UNIONS, EVEN THOUGH ITS DUES-PAYERS ARE OVER 96 PERCENT PANAMANIAN CITIZENS. WITH THE

APPARENT BREAKDOWN OF THE TORRIJOS-US-CITIZEN UNION
DIALOG OVER THE DRUMMOND AFFAIR FEBRUARY 11-12 (PANAMA
1034), AND NMU NON-PARTICIPATION IN FRIDAY'S SESSION,
FUTURE STATUS OF NMU IN ANY LABOR DIALOG VIS-A-VIS
GOP THAT NOW APPEARS UNCLEAR.
JORDEN

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